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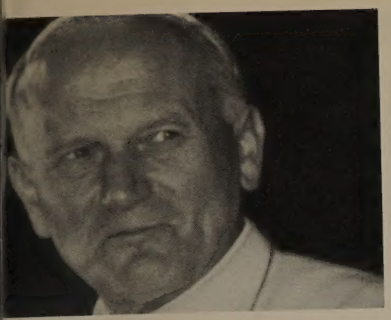

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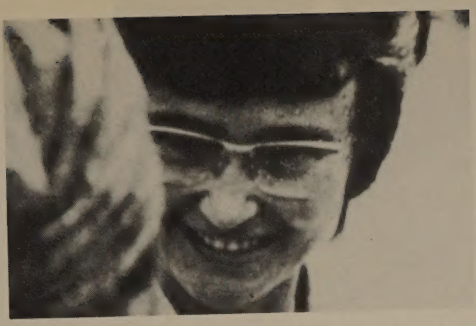

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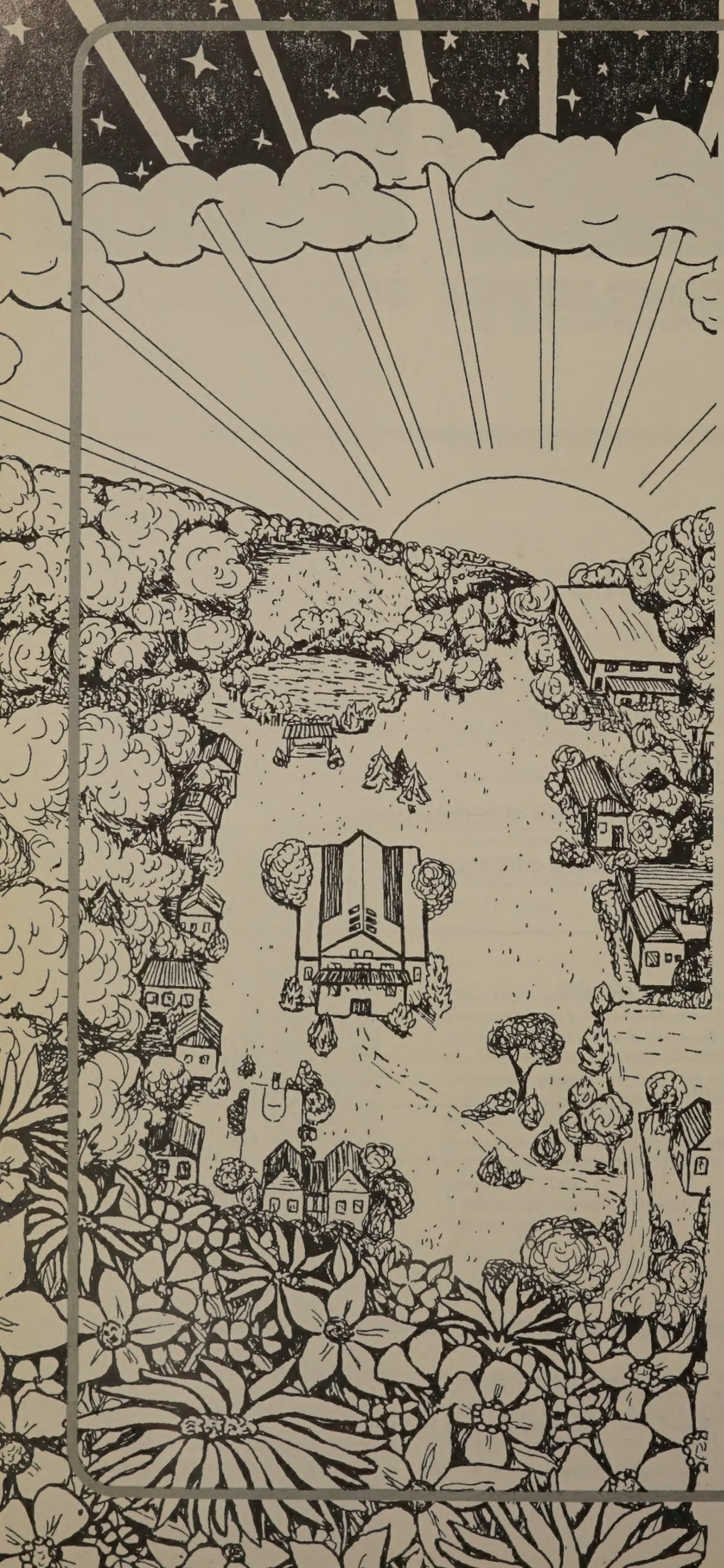

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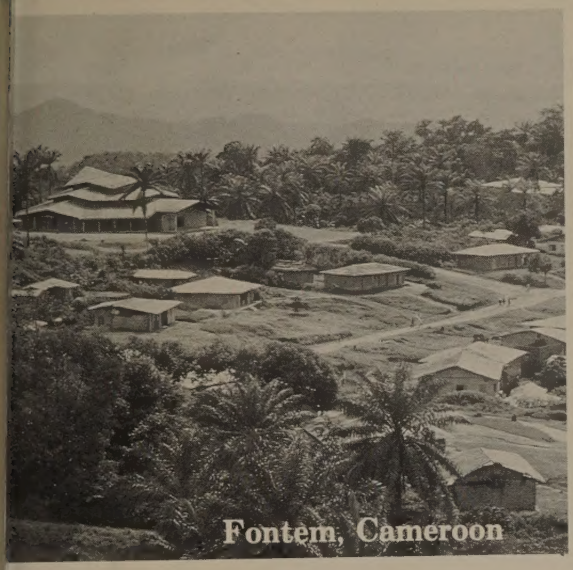

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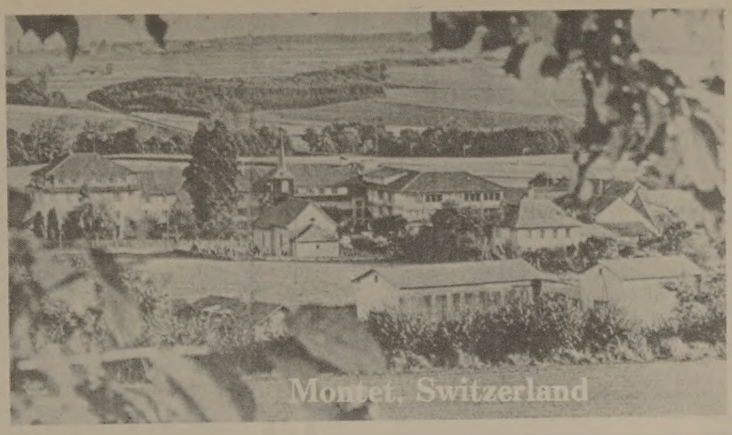

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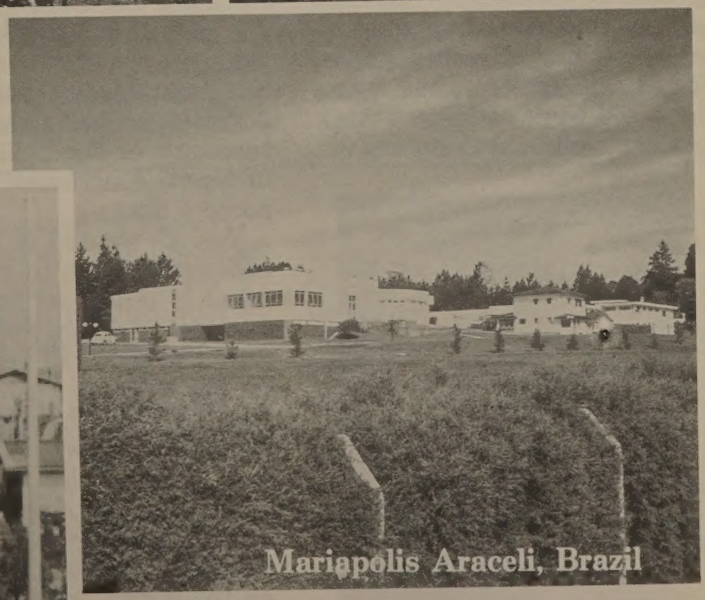

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TOWARDS A PARISH COMMUNITY

by Mauro Bartolini

7,500 priests and lay persons from forty-five different countries gathered in the Paul VI Hall of the Vatican to participate in the first international congress of the Parish Movement of the Focolare.

Since early morning groups of all sizes began filing off the buses and joining the steady stream of people heading into the Vatican's Paul VI Hall. First the pastors, and then, close behind, a boisterous group of young people, followed by couples with their children, workers and retired persons, catechists and lay missionaries. They have come from all over the world to participate in this first international Congress of the Parish Movement of the Focolare. Some of the groups have been active in it for years. For others it is still a relatively new experience. Nonetheless, no one wanted to miss this appointment, neither the three participants from Australia, nor the white pastor from South Africa with his two black coworkers, nor the representative from Jordan, nor the 600 Argentinian and Brazilian participants, or the little group of North Americans, just to name a few.

Yes, all wanted to be present and were willing to make the small or large sacrifices needed in order to do so. For some it meant to work all year to pay for the airplane ticket. Others who lived closer to Rome offered to share what they had to help someone else.

But why go to such lengths for a two-day gathering? And why all this attention focused on the parish, an institution that society has tried to relegate to the very outskirts of modern life?

The 7,500 participants now descending upon the hall could provide the answer. They believe beyond any doubt in the vitality of this structure, and not just because of preconceived notions, but because of the strength of the experience they are presently living. They are familiar with the hard work involved in parish service, they have experienced failure, but more than anything else they have received an invaluable gift in return. Even today they have not come looking for ready-made answers but to listen and to give, to participate more deeply in the life of many people from all over the world, whom they may have never seen, but to whom they feel very close. Above all, however, they have come to Rome from forty-five different countries, to express their joy over the discovery they have made of a Church that is

May 3 and 4, 1986. Every continent was represented and a variety of countries such as South Africa, Salvador, Chile, India, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Syria, Australia, and the USA. The Parish Movement of the Focolare began in 1966 when, during an audience, Pope Paul VI invited a group of diocesan and religious priests associated with the Focolare Movement to bring its spirituality of unity into the structures of the local Church.

The events of these past 20 years confirm that the spirituality of the Movement does effectively contribute to reviving a parish's sense of community. It has aided parishes in achieving an authenticity and freshness reminiscent of the early Christian communities, helping them to be living cells of the Church in our times. Today the Parish Movement is active in about 700 parishes throughout the world with tens of thousands of members where different forms of exchange and communion are carried out among them on a regional and international level.

youthful and vibrant, a Church that is close to men's and women's everyday life, a Church in which they have found themselves to be actors not spectators, workers on the front line, thanks to the ecclesial service of that expression of the Focolare Movement that is the Parish Movement.

Its exit into public life has come about only today, but this movement is already over twenty years old. In 1966 Pope Paul VI invited a group of diocesan and religious priests associated with the Focolare Movement to bring the spirit of unity and love they had discovered and made their own into the life of the local Church. The events of the next twenty years have confirmed the fruitfulness of that first encouragement which indicated that this was an authentically Gospel-oriented spirituality in touch with the living structures of the Church, that is, the parishes. As such it could provoke a renewal, beyond all expectations, of the Christian life of an entire ecclesial community. On the other hand, it is not just by chance that today many look to the flowering of different movements and associations, each with their typical Gospel orientation, as a possible prelude to a new and particularly joyful season in the Church which is now on the threshold of the third millennium of its history.

What then is the contribution that the Parish Movement can make towards the renewal of the parish in the wide variety of expressions present in the Church today? "It is a vital contribution," Chiara Lubich emphasized in her talk at the opening of the congress, "if it is true that the figure a parish today must incarnate in order to respond to the challenges of today's world is one of a community that is not only juridi- ►

cal or territorial, but also a reality that comes alive and concrete through love." The experience of the Focolare Movement, Chiara noted, is one that is born from the daily practice of living the word of God, but in particular those words that emphasize mutual love and love for everyone. "It is with these words, which we understood in a completely new way because of the charism given to us by God, that relationships are created between persons who had, until then, remained indifferent to each other. It is through these words that people divided among themselves can become a community."

This was the simple discovery that, repeated in as many circumstances as reality presents, substantiates all the life of the Parish Movement. The experiences shared by the participants throughout the day verified this as they described the multitude of situations that a parish can find itself in. One took place in the de-Christianized environment of the Scandinavian world, others in the midst of social and structural injustice such as can be found in many regions of Latin America, or in the inward-looking traditionalism of some small Italian towns. One could see however how the word of love can penetrate everywhere, in homes, classrooms, offices and lead many individuals to become one body: to become the people of God.

Shouldn't this be the natural vocation of every parish; to bring together, as the Council says, all the human differences that exist in order to innest them in the universal Church?[1] At the congress today, it is strikingly clear that this is not just a definition found in a theology handbook. No, it is reality. The talks given are comprehensible to all in spite of the variety of homelands of the speakers. Here the great and the small are together: doctors and farmworkers, priests and laity—all one family and each member is deeply aware of this. It is the Church.

The absolute simplicity of this gathering and of all that is shared could veil the extraordinary, that is, that here there is something radically new because for an always greater number of people, regular people, communion is no longer a meaningless word. It is a tangible reality formed of many universal and yet personal links in a chain. It is a reality based not on sentimentality, but on the decision and choice to overcome every difficulty by loving. It is a reality lived in that freedom that sees diversity as an occasion for new growth and mutual enrichment.

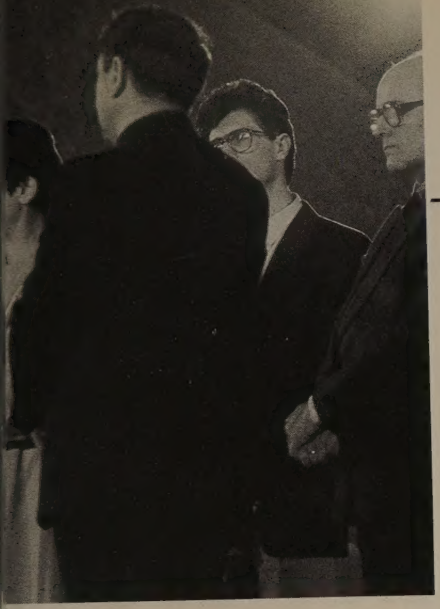
In the latter part of that Saturday morning, the Pope arrived amid joyful shouts of welcome and a wave of white handkerchiefs and colored scarves. It's a wonderfully familiar scene by now at these encounters, yet the joy that accompanies it is always new and unique.

Pope John Paul II, in his talk, drew on the underlying theme of the day, "Be builders of community ... you are the cement of unity among all the different components, groups, movements and associations present in your community." This is the present thrust of the Parish Movement wherever it is present, but it is now being called upon to renew and intensify this thrust. It is striking to hear in the Pope's words the accent placed on those values which are authentically human, and the social impact of a community that knows how to incarnate love. "Love should be made visible ... the spiritual communion should become communion with the whole human dimension, it should generate an authentically Christian sociality.... The

The journey of several parish communities

Throughout the meeting, ideas and experiences in several fundamental areas of parish life were shared. In each of these areas a spiritual theme was developed by representatives from the international center of the Focolare Movement in Rome followed by an experience of a parish illustrating that theme. We are publishing several of these experiences as inserts in the following pages of this article.

The experiences shared represent different religious traditions as well as the varied religious contexts in which a parish can be found. We will see a variety not only of cultural settings but also of social and political situations.



These experiences are not the fruit of mere human planning or special talents. They are small, simple experiences, in many respects not unlike many others happening around the world. What is striking is that in a small way we see in them the story of salvation itself being repeated.

There is a common factor: all these parish communities have found a stimulus and inspiration to better respond to their vocation as Church in the spirituality of the Focolare Movement.

These stories cause one to reflect and already foresee some of the essential elements of what in the future could become a "pastoral of unity".

Many come to see

In June 1967, Fr. Vincent Chiarle, P.P., together with a group of forty-four parishoners, participated in a parish meeting sponsored by the Focolare Movement at its headquarters in Rocca di Papa, Italy. At that meeting, Fr. Chiarle recounted, "in that atmosphere of mutual love, we felt we were experiencing the life of the first Christian communities. Returning home we tried to put into practice in our daily lives what we had experienced during those days: that the first place in our life had to be given to God, and that out of love for him we should love every neighbor. They were certainly things we had heard before but somehow they became new, and called for our response."

With time, their parish, once characterized by a rather traditional and individualistic kind of piety became a point of reference and spiritual renewal not only for the resident population but—to everyone's amazement—to the many visitors who came to see the witness of life of this parish.

One parishoner shared, "The words of Jesus, 'Whatsoever you do to the least of these brothers of mine, you do to me', developed in us a new sensitivity towards other people, especially the poorest and the sick. Many families decided to welcome into their homes people in need such as an old man who was alcoholic, children in need of temporary care, students from Third World nations, young people in difficult situations and Vietnamese refugees."

"The new life in the parish has attracted many people," Fr. Chiarle continued. "We have had many visitors. We put ourselves and at the service of the local Church and we were invited to speak to other parishes, to give retreats and share our experience in meetings for clergy and laity."

Ecumenical contacts also became frequent. An Anglican priest, after spending several days in their town said, "I thought that here I would find a community where **the people** *form one family, but now I see that* **we are** *one family."*

parish is the priviledged place for such a testimony, repeating in our age the image of the early Christian communities, the image of a new life, spiritual yes, but also social and historic."

This was the echo repeated throughout the afternoon and the following morning in the various experiences presented: the communion of goods, the use of surplus, professional abilities; a new style of relationships based on the logic of service and of dialogue, of solidarity with those less fortunate, not only as the expression of authentic parish life but as the underlying principle of the health of the entire social body; a common commitment to grow in the awareness of God and neighbor—these are the concrete aspects of love that complete and reinforce each other in the life of individuals and of the ecclesial community. They are aspects that have a significant bearing on society as well, not just because of the efforts of a few individuals but because of the very life of the community that unfolds and extends beyond those "religious" moments and places, and reaches into and enriches family life, study, work and free time as well.

It is a small beginning, it's true. But this is perhaps the "miracle" of these two days: that which is small, mundane and everyday routine in an individualistic society, takes on new meaning and makes itself heard. It is the living sign that the parish, a coming together of people who know what it means to live mutual love, can win over the isolation that would want to put it out of the picture, and can rediscover the ability of expressing life-models that are capable of uplifting society. It can become the birthplace of that novelty of all novelties, the civilization of love. □

1) Cf. "Apostolicam Actuositatem, 10.

SERVING THE PARISH

The opening address given to the participants of the Parish Movement Convention by Chiara Lubich

Our annual meetings held in the Stadium, Sports Arena or large convention halls here in Rome bring together members belonging to one of the branches of the Focolare Movement. Our aim is the spiritual uplifting or renewal of one or more groups in society or in the Church, through our specific way of viewing Christian life. So it was that the young people met for the enthusiastic and constructive Gen Fests, the families had two large meetings of the New Family Movement, and the volunteers and adherents participated in two important conventions of the New Humanity Movement. In 1982, the diocesan and religious priests of our Movement met in this very hall.

Today, as animators of the Parish Movement, you have come here with many of your pastors and parish priests from all parts of the world. You have come here to take a closer look at another sector of the Focolare Movement. We can say that you are meeting to define its nature, spirit, membership and goals; to share with one another your experiences for the edification of all, and to acquire a new thrust and momentum for the steps ahead.

What is this Parish Movement and what is its purpose? We know the answer. The purpose is to give its contribution towards parish renewal. It might be helpful then to look more closely at that ecclesial reality which the parish is.

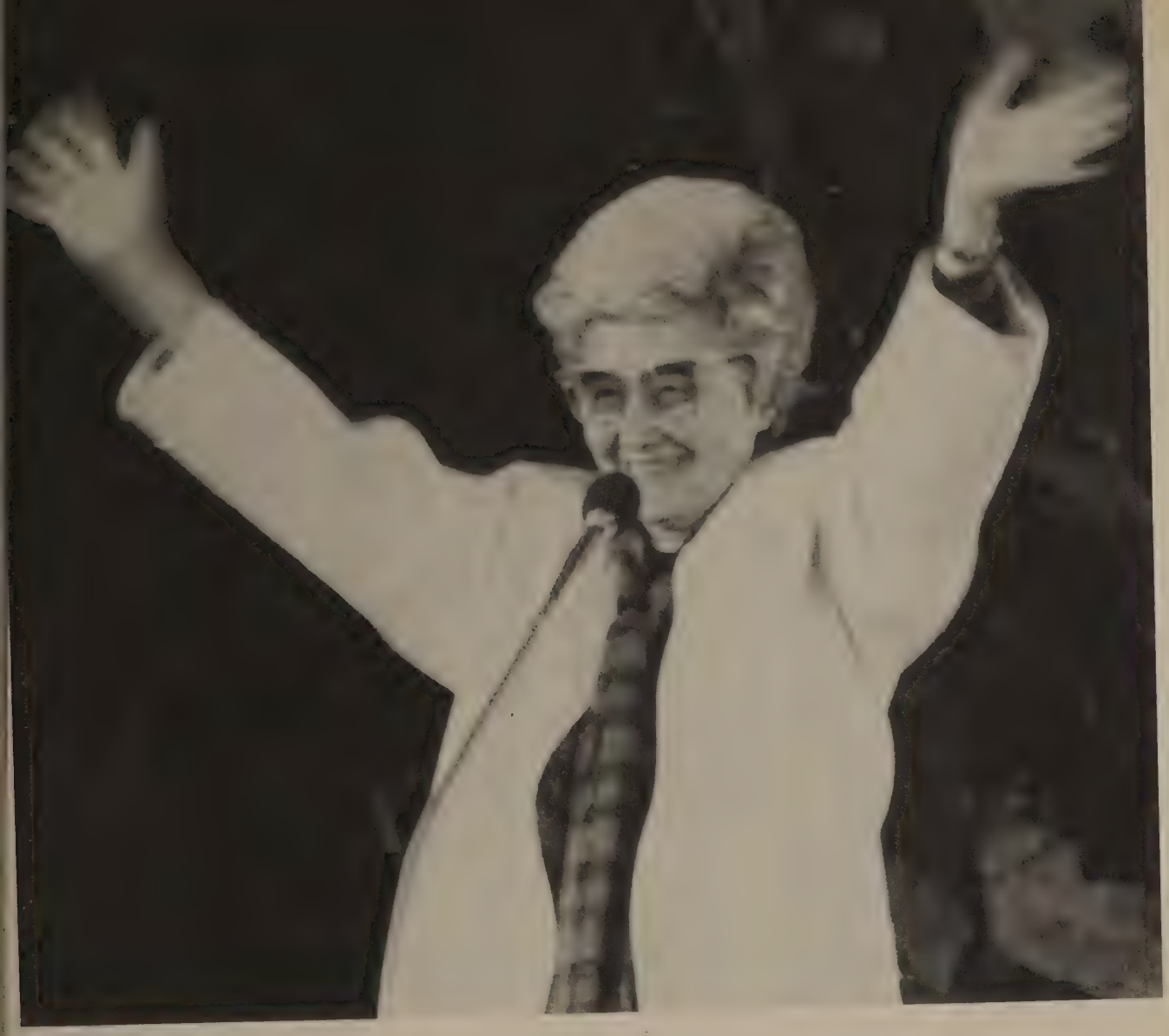
We all belong to a parish. Thus, there is nothing foreign or far-removed about it. We were born into one. We have at least an approximate idea of what it does. We are familiar with the parish church, its spiritual center. What we might not know is how parishes, in general, originated in the Church, and what their current situation is.

Due to the growing number of Christians and the spread of Christianity into the countryside, it became necessary to subdivide the churches—up to now all presided over by Bishops and located in the cities—into many different communities. Since it was impossible for the Bishop to personally preside over the whole flock of his Church at all times and everywhere, he had to establish smaller assemblies of the faithful. Among these assemblies, the most important were, and still are, the parishes which were set up locally under a pastor who represented the Bishop.[1] From this perspective we can see, therefore, that parishes are not simply administrative sectors of the Church, but a portion of the Church itself. The parish is therefore the ordinary and concrete means through which people come to know the great and mysterious reality of the universal Church.[2]

Of course, the parish is not, nor could it be, the only form of spiritual assistance available to people, whether they are Christians or not. Nonetheless, it is an indispensable structure of primary importance. It is the first community authorized in the diocesan Church. As the Council states, in a certain sense the parish is the visible Church established throughout the world.[3]

There are people today who do not give importance to the parish or who consider it to be an obsolete institution, something of the past.[4] Certainly, in many nations it has been shaken by the phenomenon of urbanization. Nevertheless, it remains an important point of reference for Christians, and even for non-practicing Christians.

Why are we, as members of the Focolare Movement, concerned with this important and vital structure of the Church? First of all, because Jesus, through his Vicar the Pope, invited us to become involved in such a wonderful endeavor. We still remember the first occasion, on July 13, 1966, when Paul VI, speaking to the diocesan and religious priests of our Movement, expressed himself in these terms: "*You, ministers of the Holy Church, increase your love, commitment and enthusiasm for the vocation that you have to serve, support and extend the Holy Church.... Apply this spirit of unity and charity to the frameworks offered to you by the Church; namely, your diocese and your parishes. Do all that you can so*



that they are not burdensome, neglected, or insignificant, but are structures in which charity is truly lived."[5]

That was not the only occasion on which the Pope encouraged us to bring the spirit of the Movement into the structures of the Church. Later on, speaking to another group of diocesan and religious priests of the Movement in 1969, he affirmed: *"Our wish for you who draw near to this Focolare (this hearth) is that you may feel its warmth and light, and that you in turn may bring it into your diocese and parishes. Our wish is that it may give you greater awareness, energy, hope and ability to carry out the ministry given to you by the Lord and entrusted to you by the Church."*[6]

While it is true that it was the Holy Father who oriented particularly our diocesan and religious priests to work towards the renewal of the parish through the spirit of the Movement, it is also true that we already felt such a vocation. The "passion for the Church," which for decades has burned in our hearts, spontaneously oriented us in this direction. For years we have been deeply aware that God has given us a spirituality which can also help the parishes become what they are intended to be in the plan of God; a spirituality which is particularly suitable to parishes in our times.

But what should the parish be like today? Since the parish is an ecclesiastical institution, the most recent Popes are the persons best qualified to answer this question for our times. Let's listen to what they have to say and seek to point out the similarities that we feel there are between our spirituality and what a parish is meant to be today. Let's try to understand how our spirituality can serve in the growth and development of parishes.

You all know how in the Focolare Movement it is the encounter with the Word of God, and, in particular, the encounter with words which speak of love, of charity, that unleashes the Gospel revolution. It is through these words which we have understood in a completely new way, because of the ►

particular charism God has given to us, that new relationships are formed between persons who were formerly indifferent to one another. It is through these words that a dispersed group of people can become a community.

To give an example, is it not by loving our neighbors as ourselves, by loving even our enemies, and by loving one another that we try to live as brothers and sisters and give life wherever we are to Christian brotherhood, to the family of the children of God? It is not then by taking the words of the Gospel seriously that the life of the Movement springs forth in nuclei of persons who are so convinced of the need of mutual love, and are so zealous in putting it into practice, that they spontaneously live the communion of material and spiritual goods, the very reality of the community?

Very well, what do the recent Popes say about the Word in relation to the parish?

Our Holy Father, John Paul II, indicates that the Word is the first instrument used by the Spirit to form the parish community. Speaking to St. Joseph Cafasso's Parish in Rome, he said, *"Do you want to know how a parish community is formed and how it develops? The community is formed, first and foremost around the Word of God."*[7]

The words of the Gospel which the Popes themselves have most frequently stressed are those which speak of love, of charity. These words make it possible for the parish to fulfill itself as a living community. Paul VI said, *"A true parish is a parish in which everyone loves one another; the members know that this is the fundamental law. What can we call this binding force, capable of keeping the parish body together? ... We can call it charity. A marvelous gift.... It emanates from God.... It is the great basic law of the Church.... It is the distinctive mark, indicating the degree of ecclesiastical life."*[8]

Speaking to Our Lady of Christians Parish in Rome, Paul VI affirmed, *"You have already built the material temple; now build the living Church.* You *are the Church. This temple is only the place where you assemble. You must build your community as a unit whose center is the pastor and those who take care of your spiritual welfare. You must allow yourselves to be penetrated by this sense of unity, of communion which in the language of the Gospel means to be brothers and sisters, which means to love one another, to help one another."*[9]

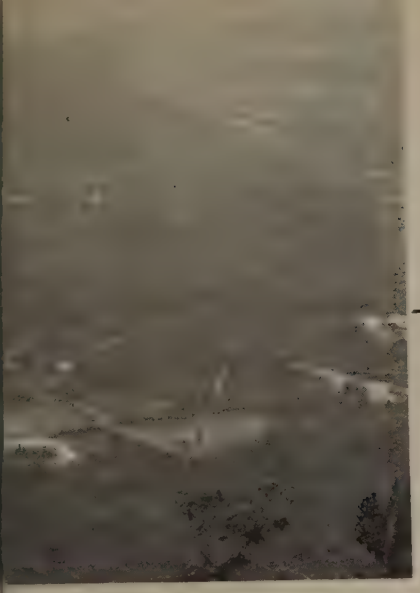
On another occasion, he said: *"Love one another, love one another. Oh, how stupendous it would be if these parishes of ours would demonstrate what religious society should be! Individuals who once were strangers, who were different from one another due to customs, education, origin, age, profession and so on, now meet in Church and discover themselves and consider themselves to be nuclei of brothers and sisters. They become friends. They seek out the sick in order to care for them, for the unemployed, in order to offer them assistance, for children, in order to educate them. In short, if there is something we can do*

for our neighbor, we should immediately feel ready and willing to say: Christ is calling us. Remember the solemn words of Christ: They will recognize you as my disciples, authentic and faithful followers, if you love one another."[10]

On still another occasion in the new Roman parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Paul VI added, *"If this Church were to remain empty, what would have been the point of building it? It would not be much of a church. Consequently, all the faithful of the parish must cooperate and erect a true and new Church worthy of our times, formed by people who love one another in a spirit of Christian charity."*[11]

So it is above all the words of the Gospel which speak of love that the Popes have been pointing out as necessary for an authentic parish to come to life and to prosper.

Furthermore, you know that if there is a spiritual reality that is typical of our Movement, it is that reality which we express with these words: Jesus in the midst. That is to say, it is Jesus who is born from our unity, from our collective spirituality put into practice. Now, what do the most recent Popes think about this? Do they feel it is important to renew this aspect of Christian life today? ►



Catechist among the Bangwa

"Our parish is in Fontem, Cameroon, in Africa and is made up of 40 villages. The majority of inhabitants are not baptized and so our catechumens are both adults and children. For us in Fontem, the role of the catechist is very important in helping people discover that Christianity is a way of life. We try to show this concretely by living a life of Christian love and service.

"We have 40 catechists in our parish and we meet every first Friday of the month. We begin the meeting with Mass. Then we share our experiences of how we have tried to put the word of life—the sentence of the Gospel that is lived throughout the Movement that particular month—into practice. The catechists also share the experiences of persons who form part of their community, and then we read together the word of life. This is the sentence we will go back and live with our communities during the next month, and we share it with Christians and non Christians. Every year we hold a six-day course where together we live a strong experience of mutual love and unity."

Pa Mathias (photo at left) is the oldest of the Bangwa catechists and has been teaching for 45 years. The encounter with the spirituality of unity gave him new strength and light for his work. "A catechist's life is hard," he shared. "We must be happy to be laborers and be holy every moment."

A solidarity fund

A priest carries out his ministry here in a new parish in a recently developed area of Colombia in the city of Armenia. The houses of the development are made available to low-income families on condition that they make monthly payments over a 15 year period, but 70 percent of these people have ended up losing their houses and all the money they had paid toward it. The parish community put together a "solidarity fund" with their own monthly commitments, revenues from fund-raising activities and 10 percent of the parish income. This solidarity fund serves as a back-up for these people who work on the coffee plantations or do seasonal work. Now no one has had to lose their home. Even with the 150 families of a model communist village located within the boundaries of the parish love has won out. Religious practice is now allowed and it is no longer obligatory to be a card-carrying member. Their leader attends Mass and the residents of the village have gradually been drawn into the life of the parish community.

Paul VI said, "*Are the faithful together only because they have been entered in the parish register or recorded in the baptismal lists? Are they together only because they meet on Sundays to hear Mass, without knowing one another, maybe even elbowing one another out of the way? If this is so, the Church in this case does not appear bound together; the cement, which must make all members into a real, organic unity, is not yet at work. Are the faithful united in love, in the charity of Christ? Then certainly this is a parish which is alive. Here is the true Church. Here there is a flourishing of that divine and human phenomenon which perpetuates the presence of Christ among us.*"[12]

We also know that the center of life for the members of our Movement is, and it could not be otherwise, Jesus in the Eucharist. It is to him that almost all the members spontaneously feel attracted. It is Jesus, the bond of unity. He who mysteriously draws to himself all those who approach the way of love. One thing we have always noticed from the very beginning of our Movement is this: in return for the small amount of love that people give him, Jesus gives himself to them through this sacrament of love.

In order to make the parish come alive shouldn't Christians gather around Jesus in the Eucharist? Does not Paul VI say that "*authentic renewal in the parish community cannot take place except by means of a profound Eucharistic piety and sincere charity?*"[13] After affirming that "*the parish community ... is built on the Word of God*", does not John Paul II add that it is "*nourished with the grace of the sacraments?*"[14] In this sense, too, therefore, our spirituality can contribute to renewing the parish.

In addition, we know that there is a secret which sustains our entire spiritual life. It is an attitude, a frame of mind which is typically Christian. If we are aware of the value of the cross, and if we are faithful to our Ideal, we will make a determined effort to give preference to those circumstances in life which most remind us of Jesus crucified and forsaken. He is the key to union with God and with our neighbor and brings about the presence of the Risen Lord in us and among us. And shouldn't this central mystery of Christianity, the mystery of death and resurrection, also be lived in the parish so it can be that structure of the Church which Jesus meant it to be?

Speaking to a parish community about the conditions of the world which are always resistant to the demands of the Gospel, John Paul II affirmed, "*... This fact, however, far from weakening the witness to be given to the world, must strengthen it ever more, in the very firm conviction that the world, in spite of everything, has an absolute need for the crucified and risen Jesus. The power of his grace, especially through the charism of the Christian laity, can and must penetrate and evangelically animate all the secular enviroments of the family, work, school, society and culture.*"[15]

Moreover, you know that in our Movement we place great emphasis on unity, on unity which is achieved by mutual love. This unity is not only for the benefit of those who make it possible, but it is also light for the world. "May they be one *so that the world may believe*" is the foundation upon which we base all of the apostolate of the Work of Mary. Throughout these forty years of life, the Work of Mary has been open to radiating the love of God all over the world.

What do the Popes say in this regard? What does the Council say? Do they also envision the parish as being this kind of ecclesial missionary reality? As a result, do they also base everything first and foremost on the unity of the faithful in the parish community?

Speaking to Saint Galla's Parish in Rome, John Paul II affirmed, "*... The parish is the community in which the Lord becomes light and salvation for one and all for a common witness to society.*"[16] Also, the Council teaches, "*Because the people of God live in communities, particularly ... parish communities ..., it is up to these communities as well, to bear witness to Christ before all people.*"[17] And the following is another statement from our present Pope: "*The parish is an apostolic community in an eminent way because it has received the mission of proclaiming and establishing the kingdom of Christ and of God, to all peoples, in the midst of whom it carries out its ministry.*"[18]

Coming back now to the Work of Mary, is it not true that our spirituality is an excellent spiritual nourishment for transforming life into a holy journey, practically speaking,

Not alienation but community

"In Sweden where Catholics are about one percent of the population and are spread out over great distances it would seem humanly impossible to create a real community. In fact, when I arrived in Stockholm, I felt as if I were surrounded by a 'spiritual desert' but I didn't become discouraged. I tried to love every neighbor in the most concrete ways. I tried to be available at all times, to be always of service. My homilies on Sunday became simple and alive as I shared with my parishoners how I had tried to live out my Christianity during the week.

"The number of those attending Mass began to grow and we grew also to feel more like a family. People eventually asked me what was sustaining my life, giving me serenity and perseverance. They accepted my invitation to the summer Mariapolis that was to be held in Sweden and to other gatherings of the Focolare.

"Following these contacts, precisely there where it seemed impossible, the spirituality of unity has helped foster a 'living' parish. Now the parishoners number about 600 between adults, youth and children, long-time inhabitants and new arrivals, life-long Catholics and new Catholics—all part of one large family continually enriched by new members.

"In a society such as Sweden's, which is so strongly affected by secularism and problems of interpersonal relationships as indicated by the high divorce and suicide rate and the pervasive problem of loneliness, the characteristic of this community seems to be a call to conversion. Many have come to know Christ and the Church, many have discovered Christian values and found meaning for their lives. The life of our parish attracts and 'converts' people perhaps because through our love for one another we try to have Jesus always present in our midst" (cf. Mt. 18:20).

Fr. Eraldo Carpanese

for attaining holiness? Do we envision the parish today as a community wherein one strives for holiness?

Addressing himself to Saint Joseph's Parish in Rome, our Holy Father said the following: *"The parish, as a living particle of the Church, is the community in which ... we constantly feel the call to holiness. The parish is a community, whose main purpose is to make that common call to holiness, which comes to us in Jesus Christ, the way of daily life for one and all."*[19]

In view of what we have said so far, I think we can clearly see the perfect parallel and harmony between our spirituality and what the parish is meant to be. This is another reason, besides the explicit invitation of the Holy Father, Paul VI which inspires us to do all we can to support, increase and, if necessary, renew the parish.

However, if we take a closer look, we will see that it is not only the above-mentioned elements of our spirituality that can be helpful in renewing the parish. There is also a particular way of living in our Movement which can offer us suggestions on how to make this expression of the Church more beautiful.

Today you will hear many things about our way of living the various aspects of love. Love is the specific charism of the Movement and the essence of Christianity. It is, in fact, the heart of every manifestation in the life of the followers of Jesus; from the apostolic to the economic; from the spiritual to the cultural, social, political and the family aspects—to all the aspects of life. In this context, all expressions of parish life can be animated by love and this is already happening in many of the parishes that you represent.

Further, there is a special "dynamism" which the Movement's particular charism has instilled in its members which can favor an ever more perfect development of the parish. This dynamism moves them to become involved in the principal dialogues which every authentic Christian today, after Vatican II, must keep in mind. Is it not true that the parish today is frequently a mosaic composed of multi-faceted Catholic realities? Are there not associations and movements, third orders, confraternities and informal groups working within the parish?

How can we harmonize all these entities? What can we do so that each group is not indifferent towards the others, or worse still, in competition with the others; but that each acts as a genuine Christian group and loves the other as itself? To begin with, we must develop dialogue among Catholics. This will enable the parish to shine forth as the "community of communities" that people speak of today.

In this respect, the Movement can offer its experience and give its contribution. Reminding us of the figure of Jesus Forsaken, who made himself one with all persons in the world and demonstrated thereby that he was not distant or indifferent to anyone, the Movement can tell us something about how to bring together ►

Vacations to rediscover that we are family

In Switzerland, because of the general financial well-being of the population, there is a risk that each family live in its own separate world and that even weekends find each family going its own way, continuing to live on its own.

Given this context we can imagine how difficult it might be to make a parish into a living community, one family. A Catholic priest in Adliswil, a typical Swiss parish, recognized this problem and tried to do something about it with some of the parishioners. Adliswil is located in the suburbs of Zurich and has 17,000 inhabitants of whom 6,500 are Catholics from various social levels.

"We thought that the fundamental thing to do was to work toward building relationships based on mutual love among the families. To this

all the realities present in our parish.

And is it not true that our parishioners often have daily contact, within the very boundaries of the parish, with Christians of other denominations with whom they share life at school, at work, in recreation and in the family? Is it good for us to always act as strangers with these brothers and sisters of ours? Worse still is it good for us to be steeped in prejudice towards those who share our most important possession: baptism?

No, we must find a way to have a deeper relationship with them. Many of you are already doing this in various parts of the world. But also others, always respecting the directives of superiors, must develop and increase their ecumenical endeavors on the parish level. We must work to restore the unity that has been destroyed. Also with regard to this, the Movement's experience can be very useful. Having chosen as its Ideal, Jesus crucified and forsaken, who took upon himself all the divisions of the world in order to restore unity, the Movement can offer to many the key to unity.

Then we have other brothers and sisters who belong to other religions, and who live alongside us and with whom we are in constant contact. These people may be Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Animists, and so forth. We must also be concerned with these persons and begin with them a fruitful dialogue in order to find some kind of unity in God. Here too, our Movement can give several suggestions.

Finally, there are men and women everywhere who do not believe. They are atheists or agnostics, often people of good will. Should we forget about them? If Jesus told us to leave the ninety-nine sheep in order to search for the one that is lost, it seems logical that parishioners who want to conform with this image of Jesus, should be concerned with these persons as well.

The specific goal of the Movement is precisely that of dedicating itself to these brothers and sisters because they are more similar to Jesus Forsaken,

nd, we at first promoted weekend trips together and hen summer vacations as vell."

This experience of living ogether in the spirit of the Gospel was for many a redis- covery of Christianity as a way of life, and marked a turn- ng point in their lives: people returned to the Church after years of alienation or indif- ference, couples were reunited, many types of reconciliation took place where relationships had been broken off.

This experience also led to the development of beautiful relationships with members of the Reformed and Methodist Churches who, because of this contact with persons living the spirituality of unity of the Focolare, try to be instruments of unity in their own Church and among people of different Churches.

these persons who might be the poorest of the poor because they do not know God. Thus, the Movement can also give an impulse in this direction.

Yes, parishes can be assisted by our Movement and we want to do this with all the love for the Church that we have in our heart. We want to do it and we can do it through the Parish Movement. We can do it above all through our parish priests who are called by God, through the Bishop's voice, to preside over the parish.

During these past years, we have already accomplished something in this direction. But it is certainly little compared to the number of parishes in the world. This Congress, however, which will take stock of the situation today, must also mark a point of departure.

So far, it seems to us that the Parish Movement has passed through various phases. It has also known the destiny of the grain of wheat which must die in order to bear much fruit, and that of the tree which must be pruned in order to produce a fruit of good quality. Now something tells us that winter has passed. Spring is here and with God's blessing the development of this beloved branch of the Focolare Movement will never end. Besides, God certainly wants his Church to be beautiful, ever-more beautiful and ever-more holy. And in our hearts too, I do not think that there is any other ambition.

Let us go ahead then with courage! The recent Synod of Bishops declared that it can see in movements such as ours a hope for the Church. It is essential that they are well engrafted in the Church, and you know that unity with those who represent Christ on earth is our most precious possession.

God has given us a charism, this is also what our Holy Father, John Paul II said, and we know that a charism is not only destined for a few persons but for all humanity. Let us share it then with everyone, with prudence and at the opportune moment, but also with generosity. Jesus will be happy. We will have responded in some measure to the gift that the Holy Spirit has given to us. And Mary, Mother of the Church, after having guided us, because this Movement is really hers, will envelope us with her love. □

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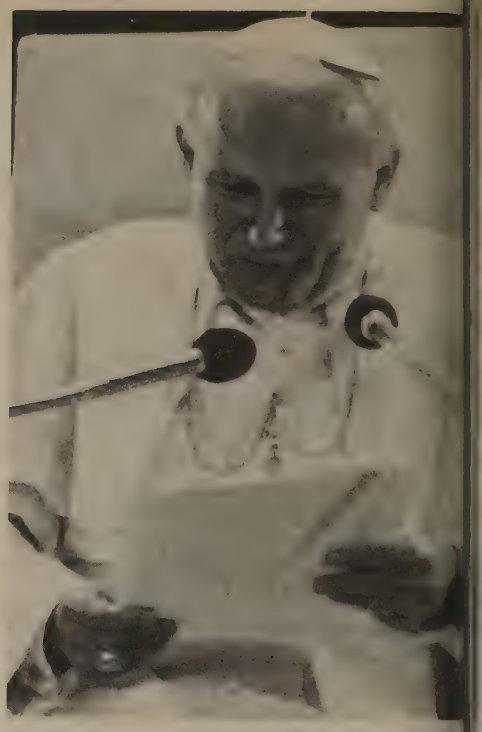
1) Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 42, in *The Documents of Vatican II;* 2) Cf. John Paul II, *Homily to the Parish of Saint Ippolito*, Rome, February 12, 1984, in *Teachings of John Paul II*, VII, 1, 1984, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 383; 3) *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 42; 4) Cf. Paul VI, *To the Parish of Saint Sebastian*, Castelgandolfo (Rome), September 7, 1969, in *Teachings of Paul VI*, VII, 1969, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 1203; and cf. Paul VI, *To a group in the Parish of Saint John the Evangelist*, while visiting Rome from Brescia, May 2, 1970, in *Teachings of Paul VI*, VIII, 1970, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 412; 5) *The Pope greets a group of 350 Diocesan and Religious Priests of the Focolare Movement*, July 13, 1966, in *Paul VI and the Focolare Movement*, Citta Nuova Publishing House, 1978, p. 151; 6) *Paul VI greets a group of Priests gathered together at the Mariapolis Center*, January 29, 1969, in *op. cit.*, p. 155; 7) *John Paul II, To the Parish of Saint Joseph Cafasso*, Rome, February 1, 1981, in *Teachings of John Paul II*, IV, 1; 1981, p. 216; 8) Paul VI, *To the Parish of Our Lady Comfort of the Afflicted*, Rome (Casal Bertone), March 1, 1964, in *Teachings of Paul VI*, II, 1964, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 1072; 9) Paul VI, *To the Parish of Our Lady Help of Christians*, Rome, March 17, 1974, in *Teachings of Paul VI*, XII, 1974, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 259; 10) Paul VI, *To the Parish of Our Lady Comfort of the Afflicted*, cit., p. 1073; 11) Paul VI, *To the New Parish Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, Rome, September 3, 1971, in *Teachings of Paul VI*, IX, 1971, p. 741; 12) Paul VI, *To the Parish of Our Lady Comfort of the Afflicted*, cit., p. 1073; 13) Paul VI, *To the Pastors of the Dominican Order in Italy*, Rome, January 5, 1974, in *Teachings of Paul VI*, XII, 1974, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 18; 14) John Paul II, *To the Parish of Saint Leonard*, Acilia (Rome), November 30, 1980, in *Teachings of John Paul II*, III, 2, 1980, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 1467; 15) John Paul II, *To the Parish of Saint Philip Neri*, Rome, November 27, 1983, in *Teachings of John Paul II*, VI, 2, 1983, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 1203-1204; 16) John Paul II, *To the Parish of Saint Galla*, Rome, January 25, 1981, in *Teachings of John Paul II*, IV, 1, 1981, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 168; 17) *Ad Gentes*, 37, in *The Documents of Vatican II;* 18) John Paul II, *To the Parish of Mary Queen of Apostles*, Rome, December 9, 1984, in *Teachings of John Paul II*, VII, 2, 1984, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 1570; 19) John Paul II, *To the Parish of Saint Joseph*, Rome, January 18, 1981, in *Teachings of John Paul II*, IV, 1, 1981, Poliglotta Vaticana, p. 115.

MAKE YOURSELVES BUILDERS OF COMMUNITIES



The message of the Holy Father to the members of the Parish Movement of the Focolare.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

My heartfelt greeting goes out to all of you. You have come from all over the world in order to give birth to the First International Congress of the "Parish Movement." I welcome you and I am delighted to meet you. In you I greet the entire Focolare Movement of which you are a branch, expressing my appreciation for the commitment that animates it in its efforts to be ever more firmly evangelical in today's society. My appreciation goes in a special way to Miss Chiara Lubich, the foundress and president of this multiform movement called the Work of Mary, as well as to all who collaborate with it in spreading Christ's love throughout the world.

The theme upon which you are reflecting during these days is very important for the pastoral life of the Church. You are discussing the conditions necessary for the building of a "parish community." Obviously, your reflections presuppose that you are convinced of the continued validity of this ancient expression of ecclesial life. Yet, in recent years some have called into question the relevance of the parish. It has been asked whether it is still compatible with the complex and multi-centered reality of modern cities, whether it is capable of responding to the challenge of an increasingly diversified world. In particular, some have doubted whether it possesses sufficient means, sufficient vitality, to make the Good News present in an incisive way, to touch effectively the lives of children, the young and the elderly, those who have fulfilled themselves and those who have failed, the alienated, the frustrated, the apathetic.

The Church's task in our day is an immense one, and certainly too great for the parish alone. Still, even today the parish can experience a new and very fruitful season. Often lost and disoriented, contemporary man seeks communion. Having frequently seen his social context shattered or dehumanized, he yearns for an experience of authentic encounter and true communion. But is not this the parish's vocation; that is, *to be "a family home, fraternal and warmly receptive",— a fraternity animated by the spirit of unity,* the family of God in a concrete place?[2]

The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, a building. The parish is first of all *a community of the faithful.* That, in fact, is how it is defined by the new Code of Canon Law.[3] That is the task of the parish today: *to be a community, to rediscover itself as community.* One is not Christian by oneself. To be a Christian means to believe and to live one's faith together with others, to be Church, to be community.

But how is a community born? You know how: a community is not a reality that one can simply organize. Community means communion. For the birth of a community it is not enough that there be a priest, even though he performs an essential role as the representative of the bishop. There must be *an effort on the part of all the parishioners,* whose contribution is vital. The second Vatican Council has powerfully emphasized this.[4] I am therefore pleased to see you so committed, so aware of the Lord's call to make yourselves, together with your priests, builders of authentic communities.

Certainly it is not an easy undertaking. It is not a ques-

tion of a merely human community. The Christian community is a human-divine reality. Our question—how is a community born?—thus finds a precise and marvellous answer: it is not born first of all of our own efforts. It is Christ himself who gives it life. It is the proclamation of his Good News that gathers the faithful.[5] *The origin and principle of the ecclesial community is the Word of God,* heard, meditated upon, and then placed in contact with the countless situations of everyday life, in order to "apply the eternal truth of the Gospel to the concrete circumstances of life."[6] It is not enough, in fact, to hear the Word; it is not enough to proclaim it; it is necessary *to live it.*

I know that in your parish communities you come together in small groups to reflect upon the Word of God; part of this also involves the verbal sharing of your daily experiences. This allows you to discover *the community dimension of the Good News.* Place this experience at the service of your brothers and sisters. Make yourselves builders of communities in which, after the example of the first community, the Word lives and acts.[7]

The Christian community is thus born of the Word, but it has as its *center and summit the celebration of the Eucharist.*[8] Through the Eucharist it roots itself in the mystery of ►

Pope John Paul II greets Chiara Lubich who was there to welcome him at the entrance of the Paul VI Hall.

the Paschal Christ and, through him, in the very communion of the three Divine Persons. This is the immeasurable depth of the life of a Christian community! This is the significance of liturgical celebrations: they bring us into the heart of God's life; in them we encounter Christ who dead and risen, lives in our midst.

But that which we celebrate must shape our lives. The Eucharist reveals to us the meaning of our labors, of all the difficulties that we meet on our pilgrimage, the meaning of all our suffering. Joined to the sacrifice of Christ, all this can become an offering to God and a source of life. Nothing can halt the pilgrimage of a community that has learned to live its life as *a continual Pasch:* as a dying and a rising together with Christ.[9]

Is this not one of the key principles of the spirituality that the Focolare Movement proposes to you: love for the crucified and forsaken Jesus? Therefore your commitment is not founded upon purely human motives, upon a passing feeling of enthusiasm. In him, crucified and risen, you encounter both the lifegiving roots of your communities and the path to follow for their greater blossoming. In him you discover the way to *fulfill your baptismal priesthood.*

The Christian community, then, is born of the Word, and roots itself in the paschal mystery. But there is a third element that creates the community: *it is the charity poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.*[10] In fact, what would a community be without charity? What would it be if it did not put into practice that which the Council called the "law" of the new people of God: the precept to love as Christ himself has loved us?[11] What would it be without full communion with its bishop and with the universal Church?

This charity must, however, make itself visible. It must permeate and order all aspects of the community's life. Spiritual communion must become communion of the whole human dimension, it must produce an *authentically Christian social rapport.* It is important—as I have emphasized on another occasion—"that the parish increasingly become a center of human and Christian aggregation; that is, that it achieve a full community dimension."[12]

Our communities are called to be an *anticipation of the civilization of love.* And this means that, based on the model of the first Christian communities, they must attain social structures conceived according to the demands of brotherhood, a way of relating shaped by the spirit of peace and mutual self-giving, a solidarity that heals the social body, a community spiritual life capable of joining love of God with love of neighbor.

I know that you are reflecting upon all these aspects at this Congress. They are necessary for the maturity of a community and for the efficacy of its witness. Today's world,

The crowd surrounds the Pope after his message on Saturday morning. During the Sunday Angelus in St. Peter's Square the Holy Father again warmly greeted the participants of the Parish Movement Convention.

often far from God, pays more attention to deeds than to words. But it is Christ himself who directs us along this path: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another."[13] The parish is a privileged place for providing this witness, repeating in our day the marvel of the first communities, the marvel of a new life, not only spiritually but socially and historically.

Your spirituality is centered upon unity. With your life and your efforts you wish to contribute to the *fulfillment of Jesus' testament:* "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us."[14] With his words the Lord Jesus has suggested to us—as the Second Vatican Council has noted—"a certain parallel between the union existing among the divine persons and the union of the sons of God in truth and love."[15] Here is the ultimate model for every relationship, of every human coexistence: the Trinity! From this supreme model there derive innumerable implications for the parish as well. In fact, the luminous vocation of the ecclesial community is to work to become, in a certain sense, *an image of the Most Holy Trinity,* which "gathers into a unity all the human diversities,"[16] forming a unity between the elderly and the young, women and men, intellectuals and laborers, the rich and the poor.

Joined by love according to this model, your parishes will be capable of performing effective activity in relation to the souls to be brought closer to Christ.

It is my heartfelt wish, dear brothers and sisters, that you be able to continue in your efforts. Striving to "assimilate faithfully the particular characteristic of spiritual life" proper to your movement—as the Council invites you to do[17] and at the same time remaining firmly united with your priests and bishops, you can be an authentic leaven in your parishes; you will be able to help them increasingly to discover and to develop their community vocation.

Do not let difficulties discourage you. Be the cement of unity between all the members, groups, movements and associations of your communities!

May Mary, the Mother of the Church, accompany you on your pilgrimage and in your activities. She who gave Jesus to the world can help you like no one else to see to it that the face of Christ shines out in your parishes. And if this occurs, they will fulfill more and more their splendid vocation: *to be the presence of Christ among men.*[18]

With my Apostolic Blessing!

1) Catechesi Tradendae, 67; 2) cf. Lumen Gentium, 28; 3) can. 515, 1; 4) Lumen Gentium, 32-33; Apostolicam Actuositatem, 2-3; Presbyterorum Ordinis, 2; 5) cf. Lumen Gentium, 26; Presbyterorum Ordinis; 6) cf. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 4; 7) cf. Acts 6:7; 12:24; 8) cf. Christus Dominus, 30; 9) cf. Rom. 6:4-8; 10) Rom. 5:5; 11) cf. Lumen Gentium, 9; 12) Discourse of 24 January 1982; 13) Jn 13:35; 14) Jn 17:21; 15) Gaudium et Spes, 24; 16) Apostolicam Actuositatem, 10; 17) Apostolicam Actuositatem, 4; 18) cf. John Paul II, Discourse of 18 February 1979.

Marilen: her life made a difference

By ANNAMARIA PERICOLI

A profile of Marilen Holzhauser, one of the first companions of Chiara Lubich who gave a fundamental contribution to the development of the Focolare Movement on four continents.

"Marilen left us in an atmosphere of peace and joy...." A telegram was sent to all the Focolare centers in the world announcing, with these words, the passing of one of the first companions of Chiara Lubich.

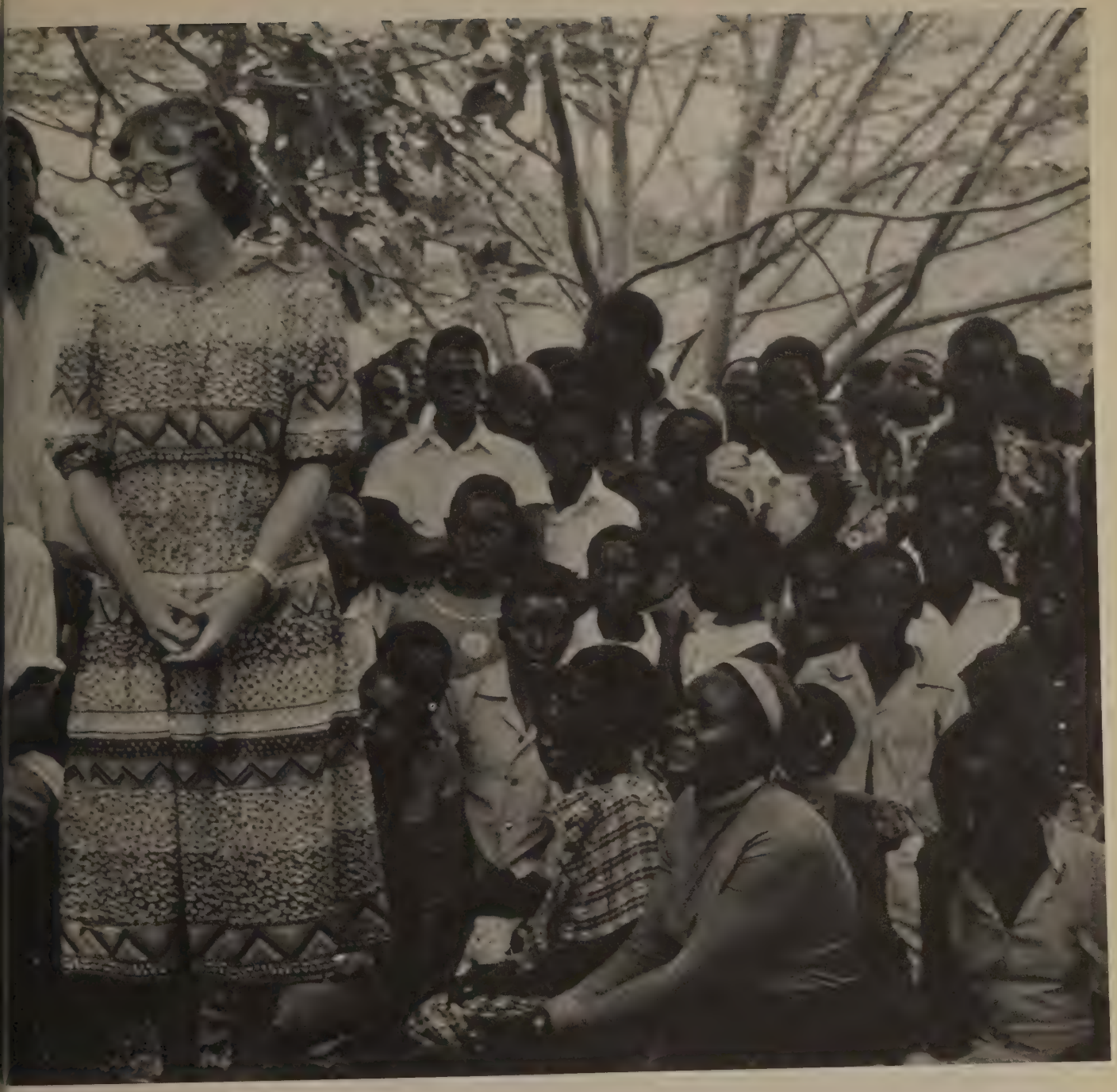
On March 24 at the farewell Mass, the Mariapolis Center was filled to overflowing. The majority came from the different countries of Europe but there were people from Asia and Africa where—over the last twenty years—Marilen had made a fundamental contribution in implementing the life of the Movement in very different historical and cultural contexts.

But wherever the Focolare family is found, there is something of Marilen which has become a part of us. This is so because Marilen was part of the very beginning, before the Focolare was even called a movement. It was then only a small group, a fast developing group, immersed in the new experience of living the Gospel "in unity." Now the seed has become a tree; it is a charism recognized by the Church for its extraordinary fecundity.

If it is not unusual now to hear mention of the Focolare, or to come across articles written about it, in those times the persons of that little group first coming to life were themselves the actors in an as yet unwritten script, forming a group around Chiara Lubich, the one elucidating the way. If the following generations were to be the tree, the genetic traces were already indicated in that first evolution of the seed. That unique initial experience would be replicated and multiplied.

Marilen's adventure—like that of all the first companions of Chiara—was so rich in content that it is hard to describe. What was that extraordinary relationship among the members of the first group like, and what is it like now? The bond among us "is a love which is naturally supernatural," Chiara herself told us once. "I don't know what will happen when one of us leaves for the next life. We will feel as if we had already reached heaven and we'll be amazed to still have our feet on the ground here. God made us one soul. It is a divine bond that not even he would want to break...."

Marilen left us precious notes on the events of those early times of the Movement. They are filled with the child-like wonder of a person who is learning day by day in a kind of school of life. She wrote of her first meeting with Chiara in Massaia Hall, a meeting hall in Trent, at a time when she was going through a period of searching and restlessness: "My life was filled with all kinds of activities but my soul seemed to be always emptier.... That day at Massaia Hall, Chiara talked about God's mercy and instead of remaining only in my brain without affecting my life as homilies often did, her words went straight to my heart.... I had never before heard or thought of the things she was saying. I was completely taken by them...." Every day Marilen would get on her bike and go to



Piazza Cappuccini where Chiara lived "even if it was only for a few minutes. I would help out by doing something while observing Chiara. Chiara herself prepared the meals for the Focolarine who lived with her." One time, Marilen watched her take the few things there were from the pantry and give them to a poor person: "We give them to Jesus," Chiara explained.

"Before I met Chiara, I too used to go and visit the poor. However, I had learned to be wary of them: to make sure they didn't already have a chicken cooking in the pot or have money put aside. Those words struck me: 'It is Jesus who is asking you.' I returned home in bewilderment. My whole life, my way of seeing things was being turned upside-down."

Marilen's first trip with Chiara to visit people who were interested in knowing about this new life was full of misadventures, rainstorms and ... wisdom. "I returned from the trip full of light"—she later said—"and with a new love for everyone. I had the impression that my mind was expanding. Everything seemed clear. It could be translated into life."

It was July 16, 1949 when Marilen telephoned Chiara to say she was ready to come and live in the "Focolare." That very evening Chiara went to pick her up and then together they travelled by bus to join the rest of their companions in a little mountain village called Tonadico. There, in a little ►

A close-up of Marilen.
(previous page) Marilen at the Mariapolis of Masaka in Uganda.

cabin made available to them they would be able to take a rest.

Marilen was the eldest of eight children of exemplary parents raised in an atmosphere of harmony and serenity. She divided her energy between the considerable amount of work to be done in taking care of a large family at her mother's side and involvement in different Catholic associations formed after the war. It wasn't easy to explain why she wanted to leave everything, neither marry nor enter the convent but instead live with a group of girls in a little apartment not very far from home. In the end, though, her parents understood. On the occasion of her departure, they planned a little celebration. Chiara stayed with them for a couple of hours: "probably to reassure them that I would be in good hands," Marilen explained. Then the big moment: "The entire family came to accompany me to the front gate. As I walked away I wanted to turn back to say goodbye one more time but I thought I shouldn't turn around anymore because Scripture says: 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." But before we reached the corner Chiara whispered: 'Turn and wave goodbye; they are still there....' It was a "new" way of following Jesus. 'Perfection according to our way,' Chiara would later explain, 'is not in stepping over our parents in order to follow God but instead in taking the step to leave them and then return and draw them along as well.... Jesus gave us the example: Mary was at the foot of the cross not only because she was immaculate but precisely because she was Jesus' mother...."

That period in Tonadico in 1949 will remain as something extraordinary in the history of the Movement. "It was a time of contemplation," Marilen wrote. We took many steps forward together. It is quite a spiritual exercise to become all "one soul," the steps however were taken in an atmosphere of paradise. Once we let go of our limited personal experience it was as if new heavens were opened...."

In that very powerful climate of unity, Chiara, with her first women companions and a few of the first men, had an intuition of the spirituality that would be the backbone for the future Movement, for its development throughout the world. Its life lived by many as if they were "one body" would possess the beauty of a natural family as well as the beauty of those living in a cloister, or consecrated while living in the midst of the world. It would be a family-church, within the Church. Up to then their lives had been seemingly fragmented—a time to work, a time to play, a time for the apostolate—now everything was unified by love. "Now life has become simple. It is always Jesus who lives in us (Jesus who works, eats, carries on the apostolate...). There is only one way to live: 'to relive Jesus.'"

It could only be those persons who lived what it was "to have become one through the experience of that period of light at Tonadico who would be able to share with us in a vital way the nuances of charity that that unity contained; the many aspects of charity from the most concrete to the most spiritual ones. Based on this experience the Movement could assume the most varied lifestyles from country to country without fear of compromising its identity.

Marilen's task, which reflected her personality and yet

ırpassed it, consisted in emhasizing in the Movement that living as one body, as mems which are articulated and nited by mutual love." A life uch as this is reflected then in ne homes, in the way of dressıg of people in the Movement nd on a vaster scale in the ery structures of a society, of city, of a civilization.... It hould communicate to onookers—even if they don't now anything about it—the armony, the beauty of God, ho created nature where the llies of the field outshine the plendor of Solomon.

During the early years of expansion of the Movement hroughout Italy and Europe, Marilen, as a direct collaborator f Chiara, helped everyone—rom focolare to focolare—to levelop this sense of unity as nembers of one body, i.e., to ırrange a house so that it reflected the life of a family, a ıouse, which by its harmonious lecor would bear witness to the Gospel. Our centers, and later on the Permanent Mariapolis would bear this imprint, as well as—in the field of studes—in art, sociology, and ecclesiology....

This characteristic which Marilen represented and communicated is, we can say, one of the dynamic elements of the entire Movement.

But besides the task that Marilen always had at the center of our Movement, her life was in large part spent in bringing the spirituality to different parts of the world. Her delicate health, her simple upbringing, had in the beginning made her think that she would never be able to speak in public to large numbers of people, as were the other companions of Chiara, "but Chiara had confidently told me: 'You will win over the crowds....' and that I would be strong as a tree in the forest," she said later.

It truly happened like that. At first, in Florence, Sicily, Rome, Milan, Trent and then in Germany. In 1967 the new life of the Movement in Asia: Japan, Hong Kong, Pakistan, the Philippines was entrusted to her; after that came Australia and —since October of 1969—Africa: the last "vineyard" that she cultivated until the onset of illness.

"Marilen knew how to make herself totally one with the most diverse cultures. She was always ready to learn from everyone, and find value in everything, recognizing the opportunities to share this new life," Irene, one of the first to meet the Movement in the Philippines told us, "It was a predilection for our country to have had her among us. The Focolare communities of Seoul and Hong Kong were born from her love and her tears."

In Africa she faced the distances and difficulties in reaching the numerous little nuclei of life that were starting, as well as the hardships caused by the climate. She came to love this continent in the encounter with its absolutely original cultures. Marilen's task was to find the best way to communicate a message and forms that, although simple, nevertheless contained traces of the western culture.

Those who worked with her say: "Marilen was able—with the intelligence of love—to communicate with the people of the culture in which we were living and in particular with those who gradually came to form the Movement. With patience she built that supernatural bond which made people a part of the Movement and for that reason, resembling people of the Movement everywhere else, all the while maintaining the characteristics of their culture." Everyone testifies to this. The people of the Movement in Africa consider her the "Big Mamy," an expression used in their tribal culture: "the mother of the Movement in Africa." Dominic, one of the first African Focolarini, brought Marilen a message of gratitude from the Bishop of Bamenda, West Cameroon and from all the people she had known in Africa, just a few minutes before she died. Dominic said: "What she gave us through her life will remain to help us live this life of unity, this life of paradise among us, for the good of the Church and of humanity."

Within the last two years, a serious illness gradually limited her possibility of communicating. She would then say: "I can no longer speak, I can no longer use my hands, my memory is failing ... I have nothing left. I am like Jesus Forsaken." It was a deep purification; the final touch on a spiritual masterpiece. It had been Marilen herself that, when telling us how to arrive at those aspects of harmony and beauty characteristic of our life of unity, had reminded us that it is precisely in the "Son of Man who has no where to lay his head" that lies the root of every splendor.

Annamaria Pericoli

HOW TO STOP TIME

At one time or another we have all wished we could stop time. Speaking to a group of children years ago Chiara Lubich shared with them a solution she found: "to live the present moment well, with all one's heart, mind, soul and strength, letting go of everything that is not the will of God thereby making of each action a beautifully wrapped package presentable to God." "Today" is a new column where we will share experiences reflecting the efforts of people to live this experience of making the most of the moments which fill the day. They just might help us all to live days that will remain forever.

Today I woke up with a sense of uneasiness. It took me a few minutes to realize that it was because I was going to the hospital for some tests. I could just fluff it off or I could love it. I decided to love Jesus Forsaken[1] in the fact that it made me a little nervous, and plunge into the will of God of the present moment.

The moments passed and finally I arrived at the hospital. But again it was the moment to talk to the cashier, to fill out the forms and then to enter the x-ray room. It was a stark and drab little room with a big machine. Something went wrong the first time around and the technician asked me to stay. She thought there might be something wrong with the equipment. "Just sit and relax," she said as she left the room. "Relax..." I felt as if I were suffocating and the walls were closing in on me. The moments went by slowly, "Could the technician have forgotten I am still here?" It was time for another yes: "It was just a routine check-up, but what if they find something wrong?" I realized how little prepared I am for a possible illness. I'm always immersed in the many activities of my life. The yes was deep and sincere, and there was another moment to live and plunge into loving. But what could I do? I had absolutely nothing with me and no one beside me. I could still love—I thought—by praying for a friend whom I knew to be in trouble. I began to concentrate on each word. They were beautiful: the Our Father, the Hail Mary.... The technician startled me as she opened the door. I hope the waiting didn't bother you," she said. "No,"I smiled in return and thought to myself: "I was in good company."

G.L.

1) Refers to the moment when Jesus on the cross cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Today a colleague at work lost her temper over a policy she disagreed with and spoke harshly to our supervisor. She stormed off to her desk and sat in gloomy silence. She was in the wrong, in my opinion, and I thought she should be set straight. "I'll ignore her," I said to myself, "she'll get the message." I felt the hardness in my heart grow.

"No," it came from within, "this is not the way to unity. You have to love," and I remembered a phrase: "May your love be like a healing balm."

This, of course, was much harder because it meant making myself small and serving. In any dealing I had during the day with my colleague I tried to put into it as much love as I could: taking down phone messages and passing them along, arranging her files the way she liked them, trying to respond with love, always.

I certainly can't say that it was because of all of this, but it did give me great joy to see her pick up the phone at a quarter to five, dial the supervisor's number and apologize.

L. A.

Today at work, I tried to love my colleague who continues to criticize our radiologist. Even if part of her impressions are right, to love her meant to listen to her and then try to resolve the problem with her. I felt I could do this now because I have listened for many hours about the same thing. I also encouraged her to share her knowledge with the radiologist. In doing that she just might find a new relationship with him. This time she really listened as if she never really thought of talking to him. She was happy for the rest of the afternoon.

At the end of the day, one nurse coordinator made the remark: "How come you people work so well as a team?

C.M.

Today we had a party at school. The director of the school has a tendency to get uptight and difficult to work with at these times. But I tried to be so one with her that I could anticipate her needs. Everything went smoothly and at the end of the party, I thought I could relax. Then a parent of a student (not one of mine) came up to me and asked where her son's basket was. I replied, "Oh, I'm sorry, I really don't know." But then I knew this was not the way to love to the end and said I'd see what I could do. I had seen the baskets being made, so I tried my best to make another just like the others. I found candies and the only thing that was lacking was the tissue paper. I was going to give the basket as it was, but realized that to give one hundred percent, that is, to love all the way to the end, required that I go to the office, find tissue paper and complete the basket.

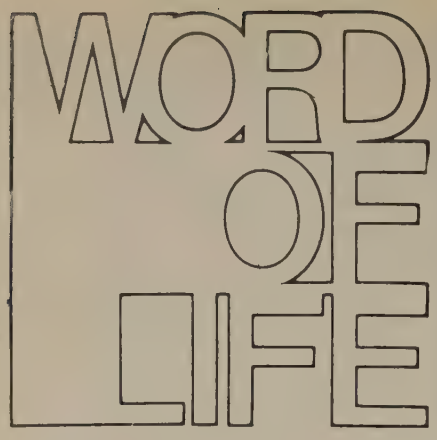
E. A.

After school today my friend and I were just sitting around. My friend left me for a minute and went inside the school to get a pop. I was sitting there alone when all of a sudden I heard a cheer of noise right across the street from my school. I saw two guys fighting and a group standing around them.

They were cheering one guy who was getting beat up and whose face was bleeding. So I went over by myself and while I was walking there, I was scared not because they were fighting but because of the crowd around them. I knew the crowd wanted violence more than the guys who were fighting. The fact that what I was going to do was the right thing, gave me the courage to go and try to break up the fight. I went through the crowd and since I knew one of the fighters, I put my arms around him and tried to pull him off from the other one. It was kind of hard because the crowd was yelling at me saying, "Stop, stop, let them fight" and the other kid was calling me names. But I had enough time to tell him that fighting does not solve anything. I told him it just wasn't right. I looked him in the eye and it seemed like he agreed with me. So I told him, "Why don't you take a walk with me away from this crowd?" We walked away. It was kind of strange because I thought they were going to stop us but they didn't. We walked and went to the park where he washed his face. He was kind of crying. I told him, "This isn't right. Fighting doesn't solve anything." I found out that the fight started with just a little argument. I told him,"Why don't I walk you home just in case something else happens?" and he said, "Wait a minute, I forgot my bag in school." And I thought, "Uh-oh, we have to go back to the school."

As we were walking to school we suddenly saw some fifty people coming towards us. In front was the guy who wanted to fight. The crowd was cheering again. "Let them fight." I told the kid who wanted to fight, "No, this isn't right, you shouldn't fight. Come on," I said again, "let's not fight." So we passed them by and it was easier than I thought because they didn't stop us. We just went straight through the crowd and got his bookbag. It was really great because by breaking up the fight, and not putting down anybody, not making either guy look bad, the two of them made up. Five minutes later they were shaking hands and were friends again.

J.O.



"May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through it, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."
(Galatians 6:14)

"May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through it, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."

For St. Paul there was no source of greater pain than to empty Jesus' cross of meaning and purpose in one's preaching and to deny it in living out one's life .

After all, who was Jesus Crucified for Paul? He was the greatest proof of the Father's love. In order to save us, the Father gave us the greatest gift: he entrusted to us his Son. At the same time, Jesus Crucified is the greatest proof of Jesus' love for us. Out of obedience to the will of the Father he wanted to share our human condition and accept all its consequences even death on a cross.

It was Jesus on the cross who—out of love for the Father and for us—lowered himself, and became poor, weak, forsaken.... But precisely by annihilating himself (a fact which is terribly absurd and repulsive to our reasoning and instincts) he reconciled us to himself—completely healing and renewing us, communicating the fullness of his divine life—and he reconciled us to each other, reuniting us in a new family, the family of the children of God.

"May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through it, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."

Jesus on the cross is the full manifestation of God's logic, which is the logic of real love. It is a love which unites what was divided and scattered; which urges us to be the first to love, to lower ourselves, to identify with those who suffer, to give value to the little things, to human limitations, and all that is insignificant, neglected and scorned in human eyes in order to bring forward his plan of salvation in the world. Jesus' cross shows the way for a radical conquest over the logic of the world which is modeled on criteria of power, self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction, selfishness, hatred and division.... The cross of Jesus has, once and for all, unmasked and condemned the world with all its vanity, pretentiousness, narrow-mindedness and short-sightedness.

"May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through it, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."

Saint Paul had long since made his uncompromising choice and cast the world behind. The world was dead, cancelled out for him. In the same way he was dead for it and realized he would not be understood by it.

Saint Paul was very much aware of the fact that the new reality, the future according to God's plan, lay in the cross of Jesus. For this reason he did not want to know anything other than Jesus, and Jesus Crucified. Paul's heart overflowed with love for him. He didn't boast of earthly recognition or worldly privileges but rather in participating in Jesus' crucifixion, reliving it in all the trials, sufferings, and especially the persecutions he suffered on account of the Gospel, the brand marks of which he bore in his body. His boast would not even lie in the number of converts he made but rather in forming true disciples, people in love with the cross of Christ.

"May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through it, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."

This then is the message of this very important word of life: we too can choose Jesus Crucified (if we haven't as yet done so) or choose him over again.

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers shared with us.

This implies that we try to be faithful to Jesus above all in the trials, difficulties and obstacles that we meet along our way.

These difficulties, as we know, are represented by our weaknesses, by temptations, by misunderstandings which can also come from the environment in which we live. There are moments in life when we may experience illness, financial problems, or a lack of success, disappointments, loneliness and so on. To love Jesus Crucified means to believe that the love of God is present in the darkness of trials and suffering; not only, but that never is God's love at work for us as much as in adversity.

To embrace Jesus' cross means to embrace a trial, any trial at all, the way Jesus embraced the cross, that is, convinced that death is always a prelude to resurrection.

Therefore the love for Jesus' cross that this word of life speaks to us about is not a passive, resigned attitude in the face of trials but rather it calls for a dynamic, active response. It leads us to throw ourselves—with faith—into the arms of a loving God, convinced that from the cross embraced with love bursts forth the light and the strength of God which overturns situations and renews the world.

Chiara Lubich

For the past 25 years my sister Jean has been a continual source of anxiety for me because of a personality disorder which prevents her from living a balanced life. Consequently, over the past years, I have found myself in the position of rescuer or guardian.

Lately I understood a new way to love her. In her instability, in her insecurity and sense of being a failure, I recognize the countenance of Jesus Forsaken who experienced all our sufferings. Recognizing and loving him in my sister's sufferings has given me new strength to love her. Little by little, I learned that if I love in this way, and place my trust in God's taking care of her (as the word of life: "Man does not live on bread alone was suggesting), he points to solutions which I can implement. It was no longer I but God handling the crises and showing me what to do.

The last time that her cry for help came she was 700 miles away. As in the past, I tried to think of a million ways to get her help. All my efforts to find someone in her area came to naught. I grew more and more anxious until finally, without my realizing it, my worry had blotted out my trust in God's providence. Instantly I called everything to a halt. I realized once again that I had to take just one step at a time, putting my faith back in God's love for my sister. The pieces then began to come together. Through mutual friends I was able to find somebody in her area willing to locate her and determine her exact needs.

Meanwhile, since I was changing cities, I was looking for a new job. An administrative position with a new organization opened up and an interview was arranged. During the interview, I saw right away that the job was not for me because they needed someone to start within the week; by that time however I had already learned a great deal about the new organization which was to work with persons with mental health problems.

I even told the gentleman interviewing me that, while I could not take the position, I was sure that it was God's love which had sent me to him to get help for my sister. After hearing the account of my sister's history, the gentleman agreed. His organization will provide housing and counselors for people like my sister and social workers will help locate jobs for them. I was sure it was my hundredfold returning my trust in God's care for my sister.

E.B.

Gen Verde

in concer

2nd North American Tour!

Gen Verde: 20 young women from: Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, the Canary Islands, Colombia, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Korea, the Philippines, Scotland, Spain, Uganda. What led them to this adventure? "To live for the fulfillment of unity among all persons as the Gospel proposes.

"BREAKTHROUGH"

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For information on tickets contact the Focolare Center nearest you (see inside back cover).

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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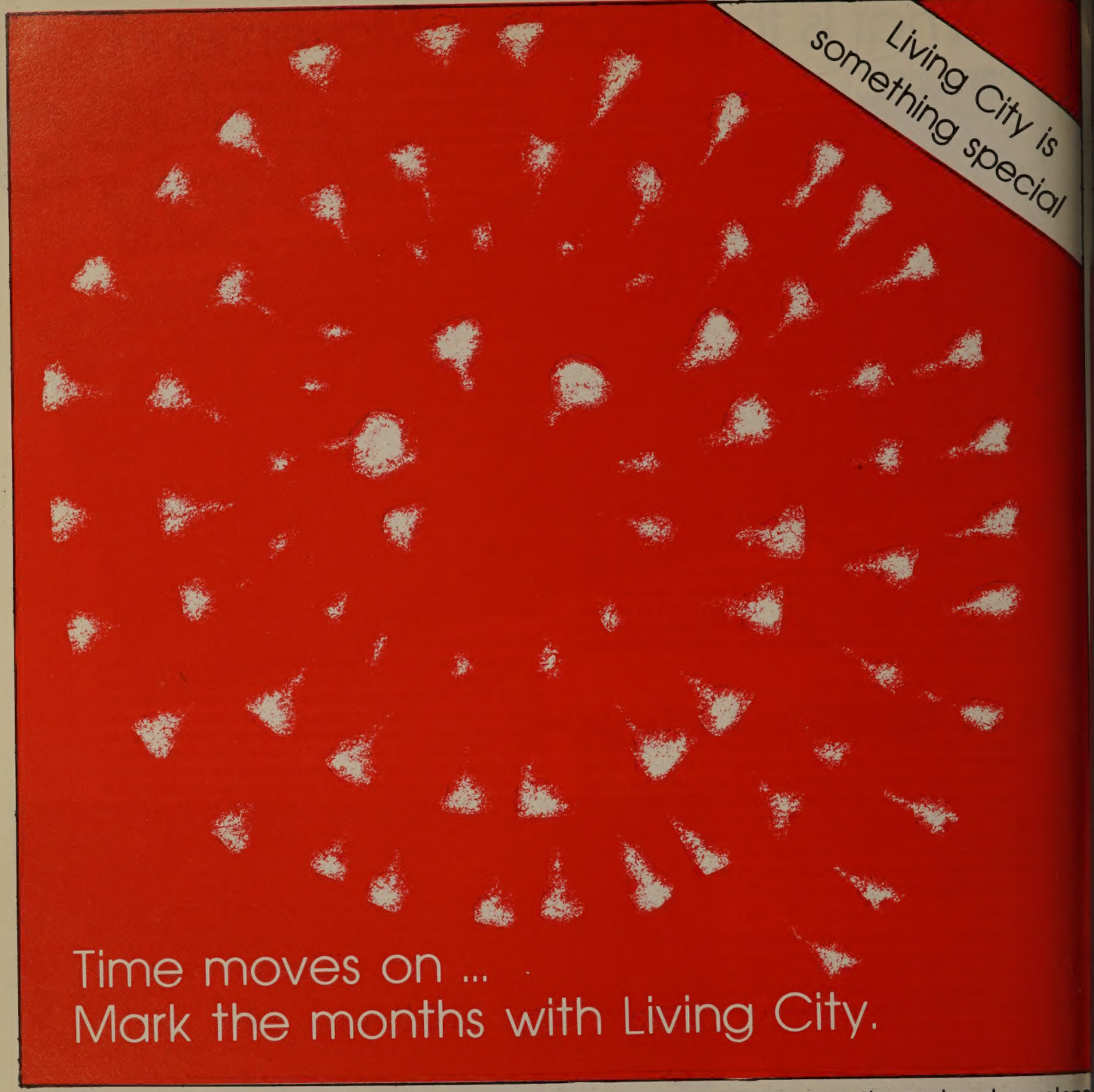

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